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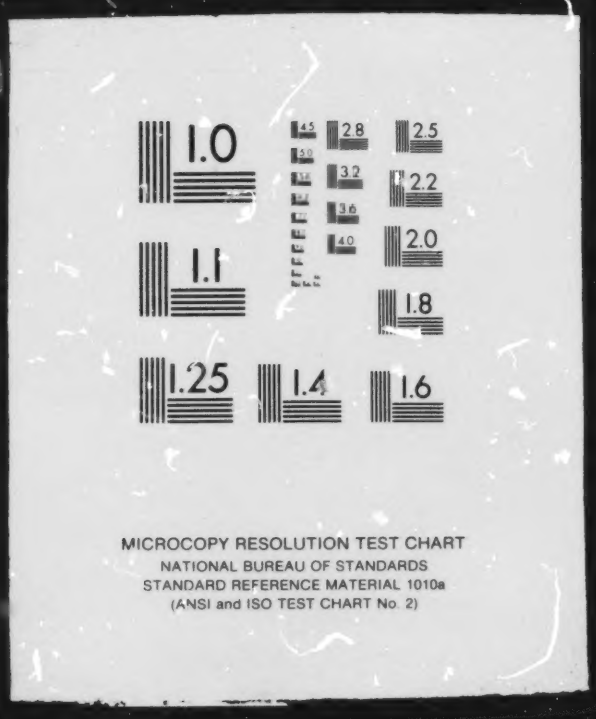
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ABSTRACT

The paper is intended to help teachers and administrators understand the comprehensive nature of a physical education program for handicapped students. Unanswered questions identified by P.L. 94-142, The Education For All Handicapped Children Act, are noted. It is suggested that special and physical educators must communicate about programmatic and legal aspects, and that physical educators must adjust their teaching approaches and general philosophy to incorporate handicapped students. The importance of the multidisciplinary approach is emphasized. (CL)

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AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE OF PROVIDING PHYSICAL EDUCATION EXPERIENCES FOR HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

by

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ABSTRACT

An Interdisciplinary Perspective of Providing Physical Education Experiences For Handicapped Children

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The intent of this paper is to offer the special education and physical education teacher as well as administrators operational perspectives for the interdisciplinary development and implementation of full service physical education programs for the handicapped. This perspective centers primarily upon the program organizational environment before delivery or administrative models have been analyzed and selected for implementation. A great deal of acronyms, jargon, and fast talk is continually applied to current special education trends of non-categorical approaches, mainstreaming, multi-disciplinary team processes, parental involvement, appropriate and individualized instruction and the like. Although such concepts are important, and procedural processes are designed to operationalize the concept into practice, little has been done to blend theory and practice in providing physical education for the handicapped.

If physical education services for the handicapped are going to ever become comprehensive and current in nature, both physical educators and special educators must address and employ certain tactical dimensions which are necessary to effect changes in the appropriate delivery of services. First and foremost, there needs to be an informational and linkage perspective to the dissemination of innovative practices of the special education process and its relationship to physical education. This necessitates the development of operational guidelines reflecting an appropriate design while taking into careful consideration the aspects of Public Law 94-142.

The efforts of special and physical education must attempt to reduce the expansive voids between theory, legality, and reality by identifying practical application of those three integrative variables. Efforts need to be consistent in their message that appropriate physical education programs for the handicapped require physical education teachers to aquire knowledge and skill in determining educational needs from a conceptual context interdisciplinarily intergrated within the process of special education. The selection of this educational requirement demands that teachers and administrators carefully analyze the organizational construct of special education as well as the operational. Tasks through which appropriate special physical education services will be delivered to all handicapped children.

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It is the intent of this author to offer the teacher and administrator clear operational perspectives for the development and implementation of full service physical education programs for the handicapped. Use of the word "clear" does not imply easy. Development and implementation of any new educational program is not easy. It requires many hours of diligent planning based upon precise program goals and objectives encompassed by an appropriate design. This perspective centers primarily upon the program organization environment before all the delivery or administrative models have been analyzed and are selected for implementation. However, the challenges of teaching the handicapped physical education still remain. Operational guidelines never taught the handicapped a motor skill or improved physical fitness.

A climate of change has been influencing physical education for many years. Conditions have not been stagnant although from a limited viewpoint they may have appeared to be. Seen from a broader perspective in which the present becomes a relevant relationship to the past, and future, changes are on the cutting edge of being almost dramatic. P.L. 94-142 marked the beginning of a new era of accountability in physical education reflected and conceived upon the cummulative changes within the profession of the past.

Many questions related to the future impact of P.L. 94-142 upon physical education for the handicapped still remain. For example:

1. What will be the actual role of the physical education teacher in developing and implementing IEPs? Current conditions suggest that physical

educators are typically excluded from the multi-disciplinary team process and if by chance are included, will usually assume a passive role. How do we ensure that physical education teachers develop leadership and responsibility for educating the handicapped as opposed to being bystanders or followers?

2. In view of the fact that physical education is the only curricular area specifically listed within P.L. 94-142 and was thought to be vital to the education of the handicapped, what commitments to program development still need to be corrected?

3. Is adapted physical education a field in itself separate of physical education? How is adapted physical education integrated to perform its service role for the handicapped so that it is congruent with the goals and objectives of both special and physical education programs?

These are but a few of the questions encountered in the development of physical education programs for the handicapped. Finding the answers, and more importantly, acting upon them will not be simple. Nevertheless, finding the appropriate answer to these and other questions cannot continue to be avoided, and now is the time to begin.

The professional boundaries between adapted physical education and special education disciplines are becoming more and more ambiguous. New models of child-centered service delivery systems for the handicapped are fast replacing the traditional unidisciplinary systems. Sherrill (1981, p. 51) stated these professions have far more commonalities than differences:

> Each has its earliest roots in medicine; each is extending its role and scope in response to new legislation; and each is dedicated to the self-actualization of handicapped persons.

A great deal of acronyms, jargon, and fast talk is continually applied to current special education trends of noncategorical approaches, mainstreaming,

multi-disciplinary team processes, behavior management, appropriate and individualized instruction, and the like. Although each concept is important, and procedural processes are designed to operationalize the concept into implementation, little has been done to blend theory and actual practice in terms of physical education services for the handicapped. Jointly, the disciplines of special education and physical education have catalyzed confusion about adapted physical education. Too often the obvious has been tainted and the simple made complex. This is well illustrated by the common practice of arbitrarily mainstreaming the handicapped student into a regular physical education class without involving the physical education teacher in the multi-disciplinary process and then hoping no problems arise. Each activity and procedure of the special education process is important to the delivery of appropriate physical education services to the handicapped. However, unless this process is presented as part of a truly interdisciplinary effort, functional means of implementation, practical suggestions, and realistic approaches will continue to be pursued in the current haphazard manner.

If physical education services for the handicapped are going to ever become comprehensive and current in nature, both physical and special educators must employ and address certain tactical dimensions which are necessary to effect changes in the appropriate delivery of services. First and foremost, there needs to be an informational and linkage perspective to the dissemination of innovative practices of the special education process and its relationship to physical education. This necessitates the development of operational guidelines reflecting an appropriate program design while taking into careful consideration the aspects of user involvement and the legal aspects of P.L. 94-142.

Finally, there must be a concerted effort to train the physical education personnel regarding installation to ensure ongoing support and implementation.

Planners of physical education programs for the handicapped must recognize and prepare to deal with opposition. Physical educators have been aware of the mandates of P.L. 94-142 and the potential effect upon physical education; however, they continue to be uninformed about the actuality of impact and the process by which it occurs. For the most part, physical educators see P.L. 94-142 as the "mainstreaming law" which placed the handicapped into their classes. They observe the handicapped students in their classes and ponder with amazement, alarm, and resentment as to how they got there. There is little doubt that the adoption and control processes by school districts and special education programs have inhibitied the innovation of physical education services for the handicapped.

Diffusion of innovative physical education services for the handicapped represents a social change by the entire discipline of physical education. Traditional physical education programs focused primarily upon providing activities under the assumption that all students can participate to some extent. However, the emergence of alternative physical education approaches, such as adapted physical education, has significantly challenged traditional context by necessitating the determination of individual student potential and then formulating activities to develop that potential. Adapted physical education represents a reversal of philosophy and practice which demands that program planners and developers address the forces of change. Direct attention must be given to the implications of peer and authority relationships, personal attitudes, physical and temporal arrangements, as well as the characteristics of practice presented by the extension of appropriate physical education services to the handicapped.

Levine (1978) suggested that the process of change is incongruent to the educational environment and any change therefore must include:

1. Communication and Publicity
2. Administrative Leadership
3. Wide-based Support
4. Reward and Resources
5. Appropriate Innovation Management and Organization

The change to individualized physical education for the handicapped must not only be concerned with the profitability of such experiences but also with the compatible integration of special and physical education disciplines. The overemphasis of specialization by special education has bilaterally diminished opportunities of beneficial experiences for the handicapped in psychomotor development. This stratification contains none of the elements deemed important by Levine nor constitutes congruency between the disciplines. To actuate this process of change and effect the handicapped, both disciplines must be involved in developing an integrated programmatic approach which is coherent and organized to reinforce each other.

The operational guidelines identified by local districts must be based on the premise that the organization of adapted physical education builds on the knowledge and practices used in special education and the general field of physical education. What this means is that whatever unique knowledge a special education program has about the handicapped should also be shared with the physical education program. Of course, some of what special education considers unique is not really so at all, or at least not for very long. An example is P.L. 94-142. When it first became law in 1975, special education was the major interpretor of its meaning to physical education. Now, the

physical educator should be aware of the major provisions and assume the responsibility for implementation as it pertains to physical education and commensurate instructional activities for the handicapped.

Ideals and commitments need to be combined with knowledge and experience of such educators both intra-and-inter-disciplinarily. Technology and methodology are giving special educators immense instructional capability, but without intimate aquaintance with physical educators their use can result in added frustration and failure to provide meaningful physical education experiences for the handicapped. It is because of this varied base of programming that operational guidelines of adapted physical education be compatible with the broad-based program and curriculum content required by special education. These guidelines should find content accompanied by organizational activities and tasks which are important for the developing handicapped student in a wholistic sense.

Geddes (1980) found that the body of knowledge speicific to the relationship between physical activity in the physical education setting and mental health development of the handicapped is quite limited. The majority of literature found in adapted physical education is not current and deals primarily with variables in motor/physical development, physical fitness, and perceptual-motor development. This limited knowledge seems even smaller when compared to that of the special education field, which has historically placed greater emphasis on the organization of educational settings in order to develop the educational potential of the handicapped. The analysis of operational processes of physical education programs for the handicapped suggests unanswered questions and educational practices that need to be investigated in future studies, projects, and programs. However, the primary

question raised concerning operationalization of programs is not whether it was possible to implement such, but rather, when are these educational services going to play a vital role in the total development of the handicapped student. Unfortunately, that question still remains unanswered.

It is not the intent of this author to overplay the importance of adapted physical education or the reluctance of special education and regular physical education to assume such a responsiblity for the handicapped. Many physical and special educators do not possess the professional competencies to provide fully meaningful physical education opportunities for the handicapped. The identification of operational guideleines should be intended to compensate for the current unidisciplinary focus and to enhance capacity for professional commonalities in the multi-disciplinary process. The rationale for such is to allow greater attention to the process of involvement and less to the continuance of fragmented delivery of services.

It is an obvious but frequently overlooked fact that teachers of physical education are professional educators who share a high degree of concern for the handicapped. Hence, their interests and endeavors are quite similar to those in special education. Physical education is capable of providing an effective and vigorous educational program that assists the handicapped student in maximizing individual capacity to develop as a positive and functional person within society. This is particularly true because many handicapped students are not motivated to maximize their ability by the traditional seclusion in special education and exclusion from physical education.

This further reflects the fact that appropriate partcicipation by the handicapped in physical education is educational and not merely a diversion.

Enjoyment is an apparent reward of involvement but not the sole criterion upon which the program is designed and operationalized if it is to have a signigicant impact upon the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective potential of the handicapped. The structure of the program must allow constant and particular attention to growth and development patterns of the handicapped as well as accommodation of adjustments to satisfy individual accomplishment.

The efforts of special and physical education should attempt to reduce the void between theory, legality, and reality by identifying practical application of those three integrative variables. It must be consistent in its message that effective physical education programs for the handicapped require physical education teachers to aquire knowledge and skill in determining educational needs from a conceptual context integrated within the multi-disciplinary process of speical education. Program design must be comprehensive in providing multitudinous options for physical educators working with the handicapped in a varity of service delivery settings. The selection of these options demands that teachers obtain information, use available resources, and carefully analyze the organizational construct, as well as the operational tasks through which appropriate services will be delivered.

Serious advocates of quality physical education programs for the handicapped hopefully can find a few answers from this perspective. Meyen (1979, p. 2) summarized it well:

> We are at the beginning of a new beginning. The opportunity cannot be missed - and it won't be if all educators review their commitment to providing the best for children to whom they are responsible.

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